



The Lincoln Digest

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Published by

The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Bulletin
No. 10

THREE LINCOLN MOTHERS

There were three mothers who greatly influenced Abraham Lincoln: his own mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln; his stepmother, Sarah Bush Johnston Lincoln; and the mother of his children, Mary Todd Lincoln. All three women spent their girlhood days in Kentucky. When Abraham was but nine years old he saw his mother for the last time. Just before leaving for the Inauguration at Washington in February 1861 he made a special trip to Coles County, Illinois, to bid his stepmother good-bye. On that fateful night in Ford's Theatre he sat beside the mother of his children. Nancy lies buried close by her Indiana home in a beautiful state park, Sarah rests not far from her Illinois home which has also become a state park, and Mary lies beside her husband in the mausoleum at Springfield, Illinois.

Nancy

Lincoln's own mother was once despised and censured by most of those who wrote about her. She has now emerged from the purely traditional and misty background which made her a waif and an irresponsible wanderer, to an honorable place in the family history of her noble son. This has come about only by the untiring efforts of several historians who were not willing to allow her place in history to become established by the gossip about her collected by William Herndon.

This mother had the privilege of tutoring her son,

Abraham, but nine short years before she was snatched away. She was a young mother just in her early twenties when her first child, Sarah, was born. Two years later Abraham came, and then after another two years a child named Thomas for his father. The youngest boy died when about two years old so there were but two children left for the mother to care for, an easy task compared with the lot of so many pioneer mothers with large families.

When Nancy Hanks Lincoln moved with her husband to Elizabethtown, Kentucky, immediately after her wedding, there is every reason to believe that she found a close friend in a young lady of the town, Sarah Bush Johnston, who had been married but a few weeks before. Nancy Lincoln's first child and Sarah Johnston's first child were born about the same time. In the rearing of these infants the young mothers would have much in common to discuss. Little did Nancy Lincoln dream at this time that her friend Sarah Johnston would become the stepmother of her children.

Sarah

The brother of Sarah Bush, Elijah, and Thomas Lincoln were very close friends in the early Kentucky days and they made a trip to New Orleans together in 1806. While they were away on the trip Sarah, but eighteen years old, married Daniel Johnston. When Thomas and Elijah returned, both purchased gifts for Sarah at the Bleakley and Montgomery Store.

Thomas Lincoln as a young man had received the appointment as a patroller for Hardin County as early as 1803, and Sarah's father, Christopher Bush, was captain of the patrol. Thomas must have met Sarah who was then but fifteen years old, and he had probably known her as a growing child, as she was but nine years of age when he first went to Elizabethtown to work.

Nancy, Thomas Lincoln's first wife, died in 1818, and in the following year he went back to Elizabethtown to marry a second wife. He chose the woman whom he had known from his childhood, Sarah Bush Johnston, then a widow. Abraham Lincoln's second mother or stepmother was even younger than his own mother.

After the marriage, Sarah immediately became the mother of three orphaned groups: her own three children, Thomas Lincoln's two children, and a boy by the name of Dennis Hanks whose foster parents were dead and who therefore found lodging in the Lincoln home. It was no small task to mother three groups of children, yet she played no favorites in this Southern Indiana orphanage.

No stepmother could have shown more kindness in bringing up a child than Sarah displayed in her rearing of Abraham Lincoln. She was richly rewarded for her motherly attention to the needs of this boy, as in her last years he was to establish her in a home which he had provided for her.

Mary

The name Mary has often been associated with motherhood because of the Nativity scene at Bethlehem. There is no evidence that Mary Lincoln was other than a good mother for Abraham Lincoln's four boys. She brought them all through the difficult years of early infancy and three of them passed from the period of childhood to youth.

When Mary Todd married Abraham Lincoln she was but twenty-four years of age while her husband was nine years her senior. No one in Springfield has even ventured the suggestion that she was not a capable mother in every respect. She was the intellectual superior to most of the mothers of the prairie country. She had always lived in a home of culture. There had always been new babies coming into the Todd home in Lexington during all the years she was growing up, and she must have known more than the average woman about rearing children.

Mary Todd was a good mother, in that she kept her own mind alert and was of tremendous help in bringing at least one of her sons to occupy a prominent place in government affairs, and the possibilities are that if Robert Lincoln had permitted his name to be used as a Presidential nominee, she might have reared a president as well as married one.

Mary Lincoln of course never knew her husband's own

mother because she died the very year Mary was born. She did know Lincoln's stepmother, and a letter which she wrote to her, a copy of which was discovered in Charleston, Illinois, several years ago, might suggest the attitude towards the good woman who took care of Lincoln as a youth by the good wife who mothered his children when he became a man.

"Private

"Chicago, Dec. 19th, 67

"Mrs. Sally Lincoln

"My dear Madam:

"In memory of the dearly loved one, who always remembered you with so much affection, will you not do me the favor of accepting these few trifles? God has been very merciful to you, in prolonging your life and I trust your health has also been preserved—In my great agony of mind I cannot trust myself to write about, what so entirely fills my thoughts, my darling husband; knowing how well you loved him also, is a grateful satisfaction to me. Believe me, dear Madam, if I can ever be of any service to you, in *any respect*, I am entirely in your service. My husband a few weeks before his death mentioned to me, that he intended that summer, paying proper respect to his father's grave, by a head and foot stone, with his name age and so forth and I propose very soon carrying out his intentions. It was not from want of affection for his father, as you are well aware that it was not done, but his time was so greatly occupied always. I will be pleased to learn whether this package was received by you—Perhaps you know that our youngest boy, is named for your husband, Thomas Lincoln, this child, the idol of his father—I am blessed in both of my sons, they are very good and noble. The eldest is growing very much like his own dear father. I am a deeply afflicted woman and hope you will pray for me—

"I am, my dear Madam,

"Affectionately yours,

"Mary Lincoln.

"This letter please consider entirely private—I shall be greatly pleased to hear from you."